Eating Daisies

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Eating Daisies

by TigerPrawn

Summary

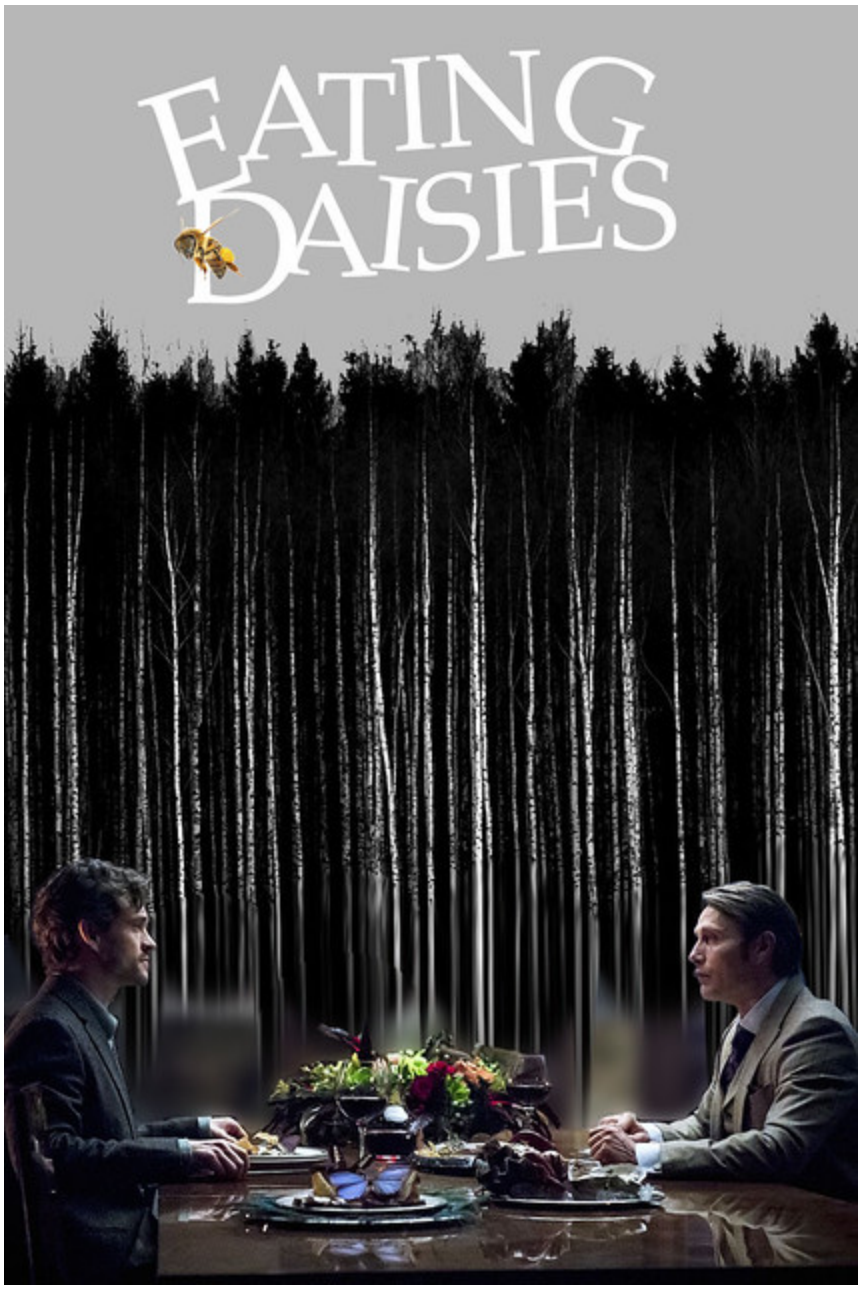
Hannibal is a talented pie maker gifted with the mysterious ability to reanimate the dead by touching them. However, this gift comes with conditions. Hannibal quickly learns that if something is revived for more than exactly one minute, a life of similar value in the vicinity dies in order to maintain the balance of life and death. The apparent power of a god is not all it seems, when a second touch will permanently kill the revived person. Hannibal has come to live with this condition and use it in order to assist in the making of his infamous meat pies, however life becomes complicated when he revives the serial killer Will Graham.

Notes

Pushing Daisies AU, but with like... murder. This is not quite as cute as Pushing Daisies. It will be a little dark and fantastical, along the same lines as my Beauty and The Beast AU - Beautiful William.

I wrote the outline of this a year ago and just never got around to it. But seeing hannibalcreative's #FullerFeast got my ass in gear! I hope I do both amazing shows justice :3

Chapter 1



At this very moment in the dark woods surrounding Castle Lecter, young Hannibal is 9 years, 27 weeks, 6 days and 3 minutes old.

His sister Mischa is 6 years, 2 weeks, 6 days, 5 hours and 9 minutes old. And not a minute older.

And not a minute older.

"Mischa!" Hannibal scrambled back to the wreckage he had been flung from.

It was cold. It was dark. Or at least it had been until the flames had started to lick at the front of the car. The fire swallowing the snow as it fell.

His mother had warned it was too dark, too stormy to make the drive home. They should have stayed the night in the town, not chanced the journey through the desolate woods that surrounded their estate in such a blizzard.

Hannibal had thought mother was just being grumpy… until the crack so loud that it resounded around his skull. And then the thud. A dull impact and a feeling that he had been hit in the face.

He could see now a tree had been struck by lightening and had fallen across the front of the car. The windscreen was shattered, his own door had swung open as his mother's door in front of him had been smashed. She looked lifeless, her head turned towards him and eyes fixed and staring. The pressure to their side of the car had saved him but killed her.

Suddenly the air was filled with a droning noise above the crackle of the fire. It thrummed through his body and for a moment the air around him swirled with a thousand or more bees blackened the already dark sky. Hannibal froze as he watched them flee the burning hive that crumbled between the branch and and the front of the car on which it rested. His eyes followed them and focused on a few that had been set aflame and burned as they took to the air. Seeming like fireflies before they fell.

He followed the path of one down until it hit the snow in a tiny plume of steam. Hannibal drew a shaky breath at the site and it served to focus him back in the here and now. The windscreen glass had smashed, an offshoot of the branch through his mother's chest. This was clear as he approached. But his only thoughts in that moment were for his beloved sister. He scrambled back into the car through his open door, stopping still as he could see she was also rigid, her head leaning at an angle that would have been so uncomfortable she wouldn't have allowed it without crying.

"Mischa." He screamed her name but there was no reaction. "Cry Mischa, please!"

There was a cough then and he could see his father shaking his head as though trying to regain his senses. As he did so there was the tinkle of tiny pieces of glass falling from him.

"Father." It came out anguished. He needed to save them but the fire was burning and his father was trapped in the front. He could drag out Mischa… He grabbed hold of her hand and arm, knowing she was likely dead but he could not let the flames have her...

And then something wonderful and terrible happened in equal measure.

~Thirty Years Later~

Hannibal breathed deep, taking in the aroma of the freshly baked pie before he began to box it up.

He was sure to adjust the plastic gloves that he used for food handling before taking the box to the counter out the front of the shop.

“Oh lovely! What a delight. My husband does love these pies of yours Hannibal. You are a treasure.” Mrs Wilkinson’s smile was wide on her plump face. “I wish I knew the secret to how you prepare this meat, because truly it is a wonder. But then -” she chuckled “- if we all knew then you would be out of business.”

She continued to chuckle as Hannibal gave a wry smile.

“Can’t have that.” He agreed as he sealed the box and bagged it.

The day was, as always, a blur of pleasantries. It wasn’t that Hannibal especially enjoyed customer service, but he did love to cook and he took some, admittedly perverse, pleasure in what he fed his customers without their knowledge.

The only thing that marked this day as somewhat different was an unexpected visit from Alana Bloom.

Alana had been a regular customer since he opened the shop almost two years earlier and had initially been very flirtatious, until he had dropped into conversation that she was not his type. Of course, he still enjoyed the occasional flirtation, but with the expectation of anything coming of it removed it was merely another form of customer service.

Alana usually came in at the weekend, it was unusual to see her on a Wednesday such as this.

“The usual?” Hannibal enquired politely, flashing her a charming smile. “Or a different lunch today given that it is a different day?”

“Yes, I mean, not the usual.” Alana seemed tired as she slid into an empty booth. Hannibal picked up a pad and went to wait on her himself, garnering a smile. “I need some comfort food Hannibal. It’s been a long week already.”

“Can I suggest the *Such A Deer*? Venison, smoked bacon and red wine, very much comfort food. With a side of mashed potatoes?”

“Oh, you know, that sounds amazing. Just what the doctor ordered.”

Hannibal nodded and smiled before heading back to the kitchen. When he delivered it to her table a while later Alana smiled up gratefully with tired eyes.

“Is everything alright?” He asked. He had become a little fond of the woman, and always found her enjoyable to talk to. She was knowledgeable and intelligent, offering lively conversation for him.

Hannibal never revealed much of his past. It was imprudent to do so. Therefore he had, of course, never revealed to Alana that he had trained in medicine in Europe. A line of work that had not been practical for him in the end, but that didn’t curtail his interests in medicine, or psychiatry - which Alana now practiced.

“Over worked.” She chuckled and then looked thoughtful, perhaps trying to decide how much she should tell. “I’ve been asked to help with an FBI consult. Well, in a roundabout way at least. There is a fantastic profiler at Quantico and I… I guess I’ll be working with

him. I've been going over case files all week and… well, when I first qualified, I had no idea I would be spending large chunks of time looking over crime scene photos."

She looked worn and Hannibal nodded, dropping a hand to her shoulder and giving a comforting squeeze.

"Well, we always have a warm meal for you here. As much comfort food as you'd like."

"Thanks Hannibal. I really appreciate it." She paused and a small grin spread. "Perhaps I can convince Will, the profiler, to join me next time. He looks like someone in desperate need of a good meal."

Hannibal smiled. "I'm always happy to help feed up those who need it."

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"It's been almost two years Hannibal." her tone was that of a disapproving adult, beyond her years.

"We've lasted three before." Hannibal countered calmly as he put away the dishes. This conversation had been going back and forth since before dinner.

"I knew this would happen if you opened a shop. You've put down roots, you wish to stay." She sounded like a petulant child, though Hannibal knew she was completely right. She let out a low sigh. "If you want to settle-"

"No." He placed a plate down gently, even as every muscle tensed. "I'll start making arrangements."

*

This was the moment young Hannibal realised he wasn't like the other children. Nor was he like anyone else for that matter.

Mischa drew a gasping breath as though surfacing from water as he dragged her from the car and sat her in the snow.

They both cried to their father for help, but as a minute passed their father, Count Lecter, drew his sudden and final breath.

Young Hannibal's random gift that was came with a caveat or two… He discovered he could only bring the dead back to life for one minute without consequence. Any longer and someone else had to die. In the grand universal scheme of things, Hannibal had traded his sister's life for their father's.

"Anniba." Mischa wailed, terrified as the flames licked at the car. She pointed to the burning wreckage - "Mama."

Hannibal looked back at their mother as Mischa's cries broke his heart. He balled his fists against his legs, unballed them and balled them over again as he tried to understand what he

was meant to do.

As the flames popped and crackled louder he moved back towards the car, looking at the buckled door with a despair that ached down to his very core. The metal was too hot to touch as he tried to wrench it open, already knowing that Mischa's wails would not be enough to suddenly free the door.

He reached in through the glass window and -

*

"Alana, so nice to see you. More comfort food or the usual for your usual day?" Hannibal smiled.

Alana smiled back as she leaned against the counter in that easy and familiar way she had. "The usual today thanks, but can you hold off a minute? I have a friend meeting me…" She looked at her watch. "Hopefully."

"Certainly." He nodded as she took a seat.

He wrote down the order for a slice of chicken and leek pie and side salad.

He would miss the pretense of friendship when they moved on. He'd had it in many places before, when he had hosted dinner parties for acquaintances that would claim friendship. But there was something different about it being in a shop. It was a pretense, but that didn't diminish the feeling it gave him - an almost connection to someone new that he hadn't felt since childhood.

The bell on the door rang and Hannibal looked up. A man entered, the same tired look that Alana had worn all week, but this seemed much more ingrained and permanently fixed. His hair was curled and had only a small attempt at being kempt, his clothes - plaid flannel - hung on him where he didn't carry the weight his frame suggested he should. Hannibal felt an instant desire to feed the man.

He saw Alana and gave a slight wave before joining her at her usual window booth, and Hannibal knew he had guessed rightly that this was the profiler she had spoken of.

Hannibal made his way to the table before his weekend assistant, Abigail, had chance.

"Good afternoon, have you had an opportunity to look over the menu or should I give you more time?" He asked politely.

"Hannibal, this is Will Graham, my colleague." Alana smiled and Will gave him only a cursory glance and a curt nod as he looked over the menu. "Please for the love of god, bring him something substantial - I'm always begging him to eat better. His dogs eat better than he does!" She chuckled but her words seemed to make the man uneasy.

"Well, that is quite understandable. Who wouldn't put their loved ones before themselves." Hannibal said gently.

The man looked up at him then and smiled, which Hannibal gladly returned.

His eyes were a storm of blue and grey. The smile on lips curved in a way that unsettled Hannibal slightly.

“If you need a recommendation, I have just cooked a lovely lime honeyed-chicken pie, if you prefer something still steaming?”

“Oh honey… no.” Will winced and smiled. “I… One of the places my dad dragged me as a kid, I worked for the summer in an apiary. The guy stiffed me half my wages by paying in honey and I just… well, I love bees honestly, but I can’t stomach the stuff.” He let out a light chuckle that warmed Hannibal through.

“Ah, understandable then. I won’t take it personally.” Hannibal replied with an enjoyable levity.

“Wow. Will, I… we’ve been working together all week and that’s the most personal information you’ve volunteered.” Alana was truly more awed than amused, but then she smiled. “Perhaps Hannibal should be the consultant psychiatrist.”

Will’s face dropped a moment before his eyes went back to the menu.

“Alana told me the venison is good? I guess I’ll have that.” He muttered as he closed the menu and handed it to Hannibal before turning back to Alana once more.

It took Hannibal a moment to register that their interaction was over and started back to the counter. Abigail was awaiting him with a grin that the teenager usually reserved for when her school friends dropped in to visit.

“I wonder if he likes kids.” She mused as Hannibal removed the slip from the pad and started around the counter and towards the kitchen.

“Who?” He asked, though was worried that he knew exactly what she was getting at.

“Alana’s friend. I just wondered if he’d date someone with a kid, y’know.” She attempted nonchalance with a shrug but her grin was wide and bright.

Hannibal quirked an eyebrow at her.

“Oh come on Hannibal. I saw the way you looked at him. You looked like you wanted to eat him… and that smile he gave you!” She mock swooned and he turned to the kitchen.

“Don’t you have work to do Abigail.” It wasn’t a question and he didn’t look back. But he did hear her light giggle.

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Hannibal might have thought nothing further of the brief encounter, until Will Graham returned the following weekend. He came alone and sat at the counter, talking with both Hannibal and Abigail. Stilted at first, clearly an effort for the man. In fact it seemed as though

he had forced himself through the door in the first place, much less make sustained eye contact.

“A repeat customer.” Hannibal smiled. “Always a pleasure to see such a thing.”

Will scratched at his stubble, seeming self-conscious as he admitted - “I… I don’t eat as well as I should and that pie was excellent.”

“Would you like the same again?” Hannibal asked, knowing his smile beamed at the compliment.

“Yes… or, well, anything from the same butcher. That meat was… tender.”

And Will, who appeared to prefer avoiding eye contact, looked directly at him then.

Hannibal had better instincts than to react to the worrisome, yet niggling thought that this FBI profiler might be onto him - as unlikely as that was. Instead he let the look linger, before continuing on. Because in truth there was something in that look, something knowing, that should worry Hannibal and yet didn’t.

Not that time, or the several others when Will came in, sat at the counter and tried a different pie each time. Savouring the flavour of each one with a look of open curiosity and a mention of how he found the pies “interesting”.

As the weeks wore on, Will came in at quiet times and often when Hannibal was alone. He would sit and they would talk and then Hannibal would sit too and give only the minimum service to other customers who seemed to smile at him knowingly and accept their fate as he went back to talking with Will.

Hannibal would remark how he looked better fed these days, taking pride in the whys and wherefores of that fact, but the bags under his eyes gave away a lack of sleep.

“Tough case, long hours.” Will had explained.

“The Chesapeake Ripper? Alana mentioned you were working on that.”

“Yes.” Will was tentative. “Difficult to catch a killer with no MO. No pattern. No motive.”

“Hmm.” Hannibal mused. “That’s not true. There is a pattern to some as I have seen in the press. Maybe even a motive? I’m sure I read that several of the victims had one thing in common - they had recently been acquitted of crimes for which they appeared perfectly guilty. Perhaps the killer is a vigilante?” Hannibal watched Will’s brilliant eyes sparkle and his jaw tighten before he spoke again, softly - “Perhaps you are right. No pattern… not for one of the killers at least.”

A lengthy and charged silence had followed.

“Do you hunt?” Will asked thoughtfully one evening, trying the venison for the second time.

“I have no taste for animal cruelty. That's why I employ an ethical butcher.” Hannibal replied immediately, and then thought to contradict himself in a flirtatious tone. “Though… I have been known to on occasion, I have a knack for stalking.” He smiled easily and watched as Will’s cheeks flushed ever so slightly. It sent a thrill through him “Yourself?”

“I fish.” Will looked at him so deeply then it took Hannibal’s breath away. “I’m a good fisherman, I always choose the right bait.”

Hannibal’s breath caught. There was something in those words of an invitation but he wasn’t sure to what. Certainly not to actually fish.

*

“Abigail brought me cookies.” The tone was something between appreciative and annoyed, which Hannibal could understand and it was a common tone for her.

“Very thoughtful.” Hannibal agreed as he served dinner.

“She said she didn’t want to give them to you to give me in case you were offended that she didn’t buy a pie from your new dessert range.” There was a smile in those words, and Hannibal gladly returned it, wetting his lips at the thought of the new rich blood and chocolate pie he had perfected. “She mentioned a new customer. Is that why you’ve not let me to the shop in a while?”

Hannibal ignored the line of query, unsure and not wanting to answer from the uncertainty.

“You want to settle here Hannibal, I know.”

Hannibal gently set his cutlery down. “No. You must not mind what Abigail says. She is prone to teenage gossip. We’ll move soon.”

“You said that weeks ago. And I don’t know, I think Abigail has some of the truth - you have seemed… brighter the last few weeks. Happier than I’ve seen you since… since before…” Words faltered and Hannibal cast his eyes down, suddenly no appetite as the food turned to ash on his tongue at the memories brought to surface.

Will had become a regular and the conversations they’d had were fascinating. He was fiercely intelligent, deep and insightful, but also dark and brooding and as in need for true friendship as Hannibal hadn’t realised he himself had been. Perhaps it was true that he would regret having to leave the blossoming friendship behind him, but he would never voice that.

He never could.

*

”Boy!” The man’s voice was sharp and snarly. It made Hannibal jump at the unexpectedness, moving back from his mother and the car, before he had chance to reach her.

“Please, please sir. Please help - our parents…” Hannibal started as the man emerged from the woods, two others behind him.

They looked rough - hard hands and dirty faces. Hannibal was sure they must be some of the destitute that were rumoured to be living in the woods, at least from snippets he'd overheard from the servants. Men driven to extremes as they tried to last the winter there.

They grinned, expressions like hungry wolves and immediately Hannibal knew that they had feelings of ill-intent.

"Begone trespassers, before we call the policija!"

The men laughed at him and he felt his blood boiling. Not just a childish rage, more than that, a need to protect Mischa and -

He turned to his mother. Was she definitely dead? He reached out a hand and touched her.

The gasp had startled everyone and the men fell back a little.

"She was dead. I saw her eyes, they was dead." One of the men swore to the others and stepped back towards the wood.

"Witchcraft." One of them muttered in disgust. "Should burn him. Burn them all."

His mother choked and coughed on the smoke that engulfed her.

The man who spoke went to step forward but was held back by the lead of them. "No. Witch of not, they taste the same and I don't know about you but my belly is eating itself."

"Mother, mother." Hannibal tried to keep his voice low and she reached out to him, her eyes a panic as the flames made their way up the car.

She took his hands…

There was one more thing about touching dead things that young Hannibal didn't know. And he learned it in the most unfortunate way.

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"First touch, life. Second touch, dead again... forever." Hannibal repeated the words quietly to himself as he had all those years ago, the same childish phrasing he had used then at the realisation. A reminder that he didn't need, having spent years taking such a great care of who he touched.

And yet, he had never in those decades planned for this.

Decades understanding what this gift or curse could do. Medicine in Europe, then culinary school in the US. Always on the move, never settling in one place for long. And in Baltimore he became the Pie Maker.

His meat never fouled, was always succulent and tender. A flavour diners couldn't place but left wanting more.

And then came the event that changed everything.

"Will…" he breathed the name as the man lay on the ground, eyes dead and seeing nothing.

He had never been distracted like this before and the results had been as disastrous as he had always assumed they would be.

Will Graham was dead.

Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

Will is alive! But Hannibal can never allow himself to touch him - First touch, life. Second touch, dead again... forever.

Chapter Notes

I was hoping to post the final chapter tomorrow, but it's my brother's birthday and we're doing a family day trip so I might not be able to finish and post until next week. Apologies!

Mischa's screams filled the air, even over the crackling sound of the flames.

In their imaginations, Hannibal and Mischa had conquered the world a thousand times, but now that world was crashing down around them...

Hannibal looked back, expecting to see that the ruffians may have grabbed her, but instead she, and the men, remained still - watching him and his mother.

Mother's hands were strangely cold in his given the closeness of the fire. When he followed Mischa's fixed and terrified stare he saw that she had slumped forward once more. He pulled her hands but she was too heavy to move. He let go of her clinging fingers and eased her head back to find her eyes glazed. Dead.

Hannibal stumbled back at the shock of it, falling. He sat in the dirt and watched as the flames licked further through the car and consumed his dead parents.

"Damn! We won't be getting at those."

"No matter, we have the children. Better them alive anyway, keep them fresh."

"I say no. Not him. He's cursed! You saw what just happened. He's been touched by Bangpūtys. It's this storm. That child is cursed, one face towards death… I'll have none of him. First touch, life. Second touch, dead again. You all saw!"

"I saw nothing! Superstitious old fool. You can starve then."

The words filtered into Hannibal's swirling mind but still made little sense to him. He continued to watch the car burn as large hands took hold of him and pulled him away.

~Thirty Years Later~

Hannibal found his pulse had quickened. A strange and rare occurrence, but as he stood over Will Graham's lifeless form his mind reeled through possibilities. He had already mentally catalogued any potential weapons in the house, decided on action for each scenario… but not this one.

He looked up at his intended victim, recently released ex-convict and no less dangerous criminal for his time in prison - Abel Gideon.

It had happened so quickly.

He hadn't expected to find Gideon in company, much less that of Will Graham.

The distraction of Hannibal's arrival was all that had been needed for Gideon to snap Will's neck and let him drop lifeless between them as Will's eyes questioned his presence even in death.

Gideon had a curious look on his face, perhaps wondering who Hannibal was and why he was in his home. Hannibal didn't let questions form, closing the space between them and striking quickly to Gideon's throat - leaving the man reeling back as he tried to regain his breath. Ordinarily, Hannibal would make short work of his victims, but Will lay at his feet…

He tried to ignore the tightness in his throat and chest as he dropped to his knees next to the man he had so enjoyed the company of.

"Oh Will…" He hesitated a moment before reaching out. His mind flashing back to his childhood and the last time he had revived someone he cared for. The heartache that had caused. Despite the thoughts, his hand moved forward of it's own volition, stroking softly down Will's stubbled cheek.

Colour immediately returned to pallid skin and Will's eyes flickered before settling on him.

"Hannibal?" Will croaked, looking at him with confusion. "What-"

Will's words were swallowed in the noise of Gideon surging forward with a roar. Hannibal stood to meet him, pushing him back once more and applying a precise punch to the man's solar plexus. Gideon faltered and then perhaps thought better of it, he stumbled from the hallway towards the back, towards the kitchen. Perhaps to escape, perhaps to find a makeshift weapon.

It didn't matter.

Will's minute of life was nearly over.

Hannibal crouched once more and balled his fists. So acutely aware that he could never touch Will Graham again if he wished the man to live. And he did. He wasn't sure he had ever wished for anything more. The world was a more interesting place with Will in it.

He recalled with no little despair the few times at the pie shop that his and Will's hands had chanced to graze each other's as they talked. How that flirtation would never find a physical fruition. But it didn't matter, all that mattered was that Will lived.

The tightness in his chest turned into an ache. The passing of the seconds reverberating through him like the hum of bees.

31, 30, 29...

Will was looking at him, confused and unsure and Hannibal wanted to reach out. He might have struggled further with that urge had Gideon not reappeared in the hall, stalking towards them - red faced and with kitchen knife in hand.

"Fuck." Will started to scramble to his feet, lumbering towards Hannibal as Hannibal gracefully and with unfortunate practice, moved out of his reach. "Drop the knife Gideon." Will pulled up his gun.

"That won't be necessary, Will." Hannibal said.

5, 4, 3…

Will continued to level his gun regardless. Hannibal reached out and a gentle hand over the gun to encourage it's lowering.

Will's minute of life was over… And as a consequence, Abel Gideon would go no further.

There was a thud as Gideon fell heavy and dead to the floor. Will had not fired.

*

Abel Gideon was inconvenient.

The beauty Hannibal had found in his gift had been the ease with which he could restock his fridge in a way that suited the appetite he had acquired and shared freely with his patrons. He wore a specially commissioned plastic suit and gloves that allowed him to handle the dead without fear of their revival. He would kill them with whatever means took his fancy in that moment, but avoiding their resuscitation was the key. That he would not allow until the victim had been butchered and he merely refreshed the piece of meat before him. Allowing his diners to always experience the very freshest of cuts. The bonus of this was that such small pieces did not weigh against life much bigger than vermin - so the mouse and rat population of the local neighbourhood was correspondingly low.

At worst case, should the kill go wrong of become inconvenient in some way, Hannibal had on occasion resorted to reviving his victim for that one minute that it took for them to help move themselves somewhere more convenient. Hannibal's car for instance. It was always appreciated when the dead helped dispose of their own bodies. This could not be the case here, reviving Gideon was not an option. Hannibal would have to dispose of the body in a much more mundane and time consuming way.

Yes, Abel Gideon was very inconvenient.

However, Hannibal found that he would not have had it any other way when it allowed for a much needed conversation as Will helped him dispose of Gideon.

They drove him out to a river and weighed him before rolling him in and letting the current drag him along and down. Their car trip had been silent and yet once at the river Will began to recount fishing trips he had taken as a child and how he still enjoyed to fish when the chance arose.

He handled the body as though it was no discomfort to him - a man not only easy with death but also with killing. Hannibal knew they likely both had a lot to explain to the other, and yet he couldn't find it in him to interrupt Will's delightful recanting of the past.

"Hannibal?" Will broke into his thoughts and Hannibal turned. In his own kitchen now, his own home. With Will.

It had been hours since they had each arrived at Gideon's house, and Will had made use of Hannibal's shower after the filth of the river bank.

"How are you feeling?" He asked as the glass of water he had handed Will was taken back in a few short pulls.

"Neck hurts like hell, but… okay I guess. Confused." He looked at Hannibal, clearly seeking answers. "I guess we should talk?"

Hannibal turned away as he tried to work out how he would explain this. He turned back quickly as he heard Will approaching, just in time to stop the man in his tracks.

The words warning him not to touch were just on the tip of Hannibal's tongue but they tasted bitter.

Thankfully Will continued - "So, this… is… I'm dead? Was dead? What happened?"

"I'm not sure any explanation would ever satisfy unless witnessed as you have. I cannot explain how, or why. I can only say that my touch has a gift… a curse… over life and death." Hannibal had thought many times over the years how to explain this to someone and knew there was no way without a demonstration. Having been subject to his talent he wondered whether Will would still really comprehend.

Will nodded and frowned, as though trying to process the information.

"And you... use this gift for your business?" He spoke with certainty and his eyes locked on Hannibal's. "And in your other line - as the Ripper." A statement not a question and then a nod from Will as he continued - "I guess they line up together. An ethical butcher, you once said… interesting choice of words."

Hannibal was too unexpectedly and overwhelmingly happy that Will had worked his identity out to be concerned that he had. Hadn't he been dropping hints after all? Hadn't he wanted Will to know? To see the real him?

“How does it work? You touch your victims and they die? You can revive them?” Will’s curiosity was open, even bordered on eagerness and it made Hannibal’s pulse race again in a way it rarely did.

“I… I can revive the dead with a single touch, and if I do not touch them again within one minute in order to take that life away again, someone else will die in their place. Life of equal measure is taken.” Hannibal tried to explain, a little off balance by Will’s attitude. An attitude he had never dreamed hope for.

Will nodded. “So… You revived me and Gideon died.”

“Yes. The effects are based on proximity-”

“Other people could have been in the proximity… So anyone could have died?” The first hint of irritation there, perhaps even anger. Hannibal curbed a smile - it was exactly the response he would expect from Will - studying the man’s own MO.

“Technically. Though the odds were high it would be Gideon.”

“And if it hadn’t have been, would you have cared?”

Hannibal did not hesitate - “No.”

Will went silent but his jaw tensed.

“It is not something I usually do. The situation was unique. And if you are asking whether I would have risked sacrificing anything, anyone, to revive you - my friend - then the answer is yes. Regardless of who would have replaced you in death.”

Will sucked in a breath and seemed taken aback. He blurted - “I’m not who you think I am. Maybe my life wasn’t worth the risk.”

Hannibal skipped over responding that he wasn’t sure that was true, from his perspective, in favour of asking - “Who do you think I think you are?”

“I…” Will hesitated and frowned, taking his turn in struggling to reach for the correct words.

“You don’t think I can see you Will?” Hannibal asked gently, trying to urge him on to the confession he had been hoping weeks for.

“What do you see?”

“Tell me, why were you at Abel Gideon’s house? In the line of duty? Or…”

“Or…? What is it you see Hannibal?”

“I see you Will. The other Ripper who isn’t me.”

*

”There is evil in that child!” It was the man who was wary of him that spoke. “Do not touch him, not his bare skin. He is cursed.”

The others laughed and seemed not to take it seriously, but the words echoed in young Hannibal’s mind. Was he cursed? He was unsure what had happened. Was it a curse or a gift that his sister was now living and at his side. Had that killed his father? Was that his mind playing tricks or had his father’s life been taken in exchange - for surely that was how it had felt. He felt it as though energy serged between and around them all, much like the bees had as they escaped their hive.

He pulled his sleeves down as far as they would go and kept a small distance from Mischa in case the man was correct.

They had been brought to a shack that had once been a hunter’s cottage. Mischa cried silently, tears streaking her face until it looked raw but she made no sound.

He would save them.

We construct fairy tales, and we accept them. Our minds concoct all sorts of fantasies when we don't want to believe something.

Days and days passed and Hannibal allowed Mischa to snuggle against him so long as the thin blanket they had been tossed remained between them.

“Too thin.” One of the men commented as he circled fingers around Mischa’s wrist. “We need to feed them up if we’re going to last the winter.”

“Give them the scraps.” Another replied, the words curling into a cruel laugh.

A bowl was slung to them, dried and burned meat that they were barely able to chew, and yet it was a relief from the stale bread crusts and berries they had been afforded so far.

A small portion but it made Mischa smile, happy to feel somewhat full for the first time since their accident. If he could keep her well fed forever he would. He would do anything to make sure she was happy and well.

Every day she was saved from growing weaker as she ate the scraps they gave. Hannibal even allowed her the most of his own share.

But then -

“Mama!” Her word was full of surprise and a quickly fading happiness as she remembered the car crash and fire. Hannibal looked at her, not understanding at first what had prompted it. And then he followed her tear rimmed eyes to the bowl. Within the blackened meat nestled a diamond earring their mother had worn the last time they had seen her.

After his parent’s death, Hannibal avoided social attachments, fearing what he’d do if someone else he loved died.

*

Hannibal had learned well, a long time ago, what his touch could do. What it could give and take.

Never had it felt so painful. Not even with Mischa.

He had still been able to offer her the comfort and support she needed with care and diligence. But with Will…

As the man's cheeks had bloomed, and his eyes had sparkled, Hannibal had wanted nothing more than to brush his lips to Will's reddening cheek and feel the heat there.

"I had hoped you knew but…" Will's voice had trembled. "Because I was sure I saw you too. That you and the Ripper were the same person. I… I hid my own kills in yours for convenience at first, but… The remains. When we would discover the butchered remains - the beauty you made of them, I was overwhelmed. I..."

Hannibal nodded an acknowledgment. It took everything within his power not to raise a hand and caress the man's cheek, or run a thumb across his lips. A touch that felt like it would be so natural between them after all these weeks of friendship.

"I… knew, of course, that not all the so-called Ripper cases were mine. I became as certain as I could be that they were you. Some even… felt like a message." Hannibal tried to hide that hint to his voice that betrayed he had felt such hope.

Will smiled bashfully. "I guess, after a while I was reaching out. They were… They became a… A love letter."

Hannibal smiled and it had felt as painful as though that smile had been sliced across his skin.

"But we can't ever touch. Or I'll die?" Will asked, a pain there. One that mirrored Hannibal's own.

Hannibal nodded.

"You condemned me even as you saved me." Will's words were soft, like a gentle caress. "I'd kiss you if it wouldn't kill me. I think it would almost be worth it."

Hannibal swallowed his anguish. "I wouldn't wish it."

"What do you think it would feel like? Death? Dying from a kiss?" There was something painful and playful at once in Will's tone.

"I imagine it to be like tumbling over a cliff, into the harsh crash of cleansing water. Falling into an unknown. An end and a beginning."

"Wow. That almost makes me want to try." That low and dark chuckle again.

"I don't think I could ever let you." Hannibal admitted.

After a silence heavy with longing and sadness, he showed Will to his room. A spare room next to Hannibal's.

And when he had laid down to sleep that night, he pressed his hand against the wall, and was sure he could feel Will's pressing back from the other side, as though it were nothing more than thin glass separating them.

*

The morning felt surreal.

Having Will in his house, in his kitchen and not under the circumstances he had once hoped. Things had moved both quickly and differently than he had ever expected or desired.

They stood in the kitchen silently sipping at coffee Hannibal had freshly prepared, whilst breakfast sizzled on the cooker.

Hannibal found himself once more considering his words and knowing, given the lateness of the hour, that he had no time to broach the topic any other way than bluntly.

"Will, there is… something I should have told you. Someone you should meet." Hannibal stumbled over the words a little and noted how Will bristled at them.

He was silent for a moment and then muttered over the rim of the cup he raised to his lips - "Damn. You're not married are you? This could get awkward." There was a quiet chuckle but something like concern lingered behind it.

"No." Hannibal smiled reassuringly. "I have a ward. She lives in the other wing of the house but will be joining us for breakfast. I thought I should explain-"

"Good morning." Her sweet voice interrupted Hannibal and he turned to see the child dressed for the day but fresh from sleep.

"Mischa. This… this is Will." Hannibal hesitated.

Her smile grew broad and she went immediately to the man she knew Hannibal had become close to. No doubt with clear ideas in her mind of what had transpired the evening before. None of which likely coincided with the truth.

"Will, I'm so pleased to meet you." She held out her hand, small and soft compared to Will's as he smiled and reached out too. The look on his face said it all - he saw a precocious and formal child. He did not see the woman who had not aged a day since her brother revived her from death.

And Mischa clearly saw the immediate truth of Will, even before their hands touched - recognised something she knew well within herself.

"Oh! Oh, no. Oh, Hannibal." Her voice had the quality of a child but the sombre tone belonged to someone much older. "What did you do?"

She turned to him, tears brimming in her eyes.

*

“Please… please…”

Hannibal had saved him for last. The man who had thrown them the flesh of their parents and laughed. He was sprawled on the floor where he had fallen over the body of one of his friends. Backing away from Hannibal with terror in his eyes, scrambling backwards but unable to gain purchase as he slipped in blood and viscous fluids.

It had been a work of days, loosening his binds. But he had watched them. He knew their ways, he knew their weapons. Once free in the darkness in the cabin he had become so familiar with without moving a muscle, Hannibal stole silently amongst their sleeping forms. This man, he always fell asleep when it was his watch - what was there to fear from children?

He had covered Mischa in the thin blanket and told her not to watch, to stay hidden no matter what she might hear.

The man looked about him in horror, and then back to Hannibal, who knew that blood was thick on his skin, sticky and drying hard.

“You brought us here… And now death has followed you home, come to live in your house.” Hannibal told him.

It was a quick thing. An easy movement because the knife was so sharp. He’d watched the man sharpen it over and over for days before he had freed himself and stolen it. Before he had slid it into one and then another and now this last one. But then the interesting part would begin.

Hannibal had always been interested in science, and it felt that there was something of the scientific about testing this curse he had been accused of.

As the man drew his last breath Hannibal sat beside him. He waited until the body evacuated and started to cool. And then he touched a hand to his face and watched relief followed by terror as the man revived and Hannibal ripped his throat out with the same teeth that had masticated the flesh of his parents.

Killing must feel good to God, too. He does it all the time, and are we not created in his image?

Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

As happy an end as there might be.

The facts were these: Three vagabonds were found mauled to death in a hunting lodge on the Lecter Estate. The desiccated remains of the Count and Countess were present, but thankfully the children were found alive at Castle Lecter. The Children have not spoken a word.

Mischa was sure Hannibal just didn't want to speak.

Mischa was no longer sure she knew how.

The orphanage they were sent to whilst the authorities tried to locate their uncle - last seen somewhere in East Asia - was cramped and cruel. They were of course separated into the boys and girls sections and only had limited contact. When they were together they didn't speak any more than they did with anyone else - which was to say, not at all.

Hannibal gave her no comfort other than soft looks. She understood and didn't press for the physical affection of hugs or even the playful tugging of her pigtails, because she knew the consequences. They both did.

And so they didn't talk.

Nothing to say and too much at the same time. Horror behind them and uncertainty ahead, as the flesh of their parents sat uneasy within them and the knowledge of Hannibal's curse weighed just as heavily in their guts.

It was over a year before Uncle Roberto and his new wife were found in Japan and arranged for the children to be taken to their house in Paris.

Two remarkable things happened in their first year there.

They began to talk again, quietly and almost tentative at first to each other and those around them. Though this was not one of the remarkable things. One concerned Hannibal and the other Mischa.

Mischa, it became ever more apparent, had not aged since the day she had been revived.

Hannibal found a talent in butchery.

~Thirty Years Later~

Mischa watched, heavy heart, as her brother fell in love a little more every day.

Will Graham was his true other half, the half that Mischa had never been nor was meant to be. And yet Hannibal had been bound to her in a way that would never release them. Not even for the love of another.

At first, Will had been unsure if he should or would stay with them. But once Hannibal had explained who Mischa was and what his curse entailed, Will had decided to stay. Once he understood his own situation reflected in her, he felt he should stay in order to learn more, to understand more before, perhaps, going off on his own.

Or so he said.

Mischa saw the truth of it clearly. Because as her brother fell, so did Will Graham.

Weeks passed into months and the men talked and laughed and held comfortable silences together. He was of course the reason Hannibal would want to stay in Baltimore as Mischa had suggested he did. There was little denying that now. Little talk of moving onto new places where Mischa did not seem to have suspiciously aged no time at all whilst there.

Her heart broke over and over as it was filled with joy for them and then brought down by the weight of their reality. Will would never age. They would together watch Hannibal grow old and die without them - and there was no comfort in that.

They could never touch.

And how they longed to, she could see. The lingering looks, the twitch of fingers.

She often saw them walking quietly about the garden in full bloom of daisies. And when one might get the urge to reach for the other's hand, they quelled it and instead took hold of their own hand behind their back. They would both do this, walking hands behind backs as they wished to hold each others, as they likely imagined they were.

*

Hannibal ached.

He had, as with most nights, fallen asleep with his hand against the wall, sure he could feel Will on the other side doing the same. Or at least wanting to believe so.

So much time had passed and Will had never left. He still worked, they both did - their daily grind before returning to each other. To all intents and purposes they were perceived by the wider world as having fallen into a whirlwind romance that had resulted in Will moving in with Hannibal almost immediately.

After a week, the houseguests had increased to include Will's dogs.

Hannibal had never had much time or patience for pets in the past, even though Mischa had begged for one when they had first left Paris. He had feared giving in to her would result in requests he would not be able to give into on their death. As time passed she had stopped

asking. But he could see now the joy they brought as he watched Will and Mischa play with them amongst the daisies that seemed to grown in over abundance since Will had moved to the house.

Hannibal even found himself allowing the small one - Buster - to nest in his lap from time to time. He petted over the same short fur that Will had, and imagined what it would be like for the dog to sit between them and their hands to meet.

When he joined them in the garden, the dogs circled him in greeting before resuming their play as they tried - thankfully unsuccessfully to snap at the bees that went from daisy to daisy.

“I’ve never seen bees so crazy for daisies before.” Will smiled up at him from the blanket they had laid out. Hannibal felt his heart swell at the easy way in which the man slotted into his and Mischa’s life.

“They are drawn to them as I am to you.” Hannibal returned with his own smile before even thinking, and then expected the man to cringe. But Will’s blush was beautiful, all the more so for knowing how deadly the man could be.

“Are you ready?” Will asked, getting to his feet before reaching down and plucking one of the larger daisies and putting it behind Mischa’s ear as she pushed him playfully away. The sight hurt Hannibal - he could allow himself no casual playfulness with either of them.

Despite being together their childhood had been a lonely one for them both.

Mischa must have understood the expression on his face and her own smile faded. “You two go. I will make dinner and leave it out for you. Try not to be too late.”

“Yes mom.” Will joked as he stepped towards Hannibal.

As an automatic reaction Hannibal took a step back and sadly noted the flicker of something like hurt across Will’s face. This shouldn’t be so hard as it was. He had a lifetime of practice avoiding touch. Yes in the beginning with Mischa it had been difficult when his little sister wanted nothing but comfort from the cruelties of their early existence. But she had understood, witnessed his gift in a way that even her young age at the time had not hindered the acceptance of. And they grew into a way of existing alongside each other.

Will was different. He understood well enough, as well as an adult could without the innocent mechanisms of a child’s mind to accept fairy tales and magic, if that was what it could be called. But there was this dull ache they seemed to share - it buzzed between them and made holding back more effort than Hannibal had ever needed before. More control.

Hannibal schooled his expression and nodded before turning back to the house. It was late afternoon they really should leave soon.

*

The drive had been pleasant, talking, laughing side by side as the city gave way to countryside.

The Ripper's MO had solidified.

Before, Hannibal chose his victims by their rudeness. This had the added good fortune of being randomly selective. It was hard to trace a killer who didn't appear to have an MO - no preferred gender, age, race, profession or interest.

Will, a faux-Ripper, had chosen them as a vigilante might. And though Hannibal suspected that might change with time, with escalation, it was clearly something necessary to Will's psyche.

It was for that reason that Hannibal had accommodated Will in his MO. And the reason they would drive so far, and into the next State, in order to kill the man Will had picked out as their next victim.

Will had observed him kill in the last few months - victim's Will had chosen. And he had watched with an eager enjoyment as Hannibal had killed, butchered and then arranged and displayed. He had wanted to see, to learn. He wanted to create the same art.

But this would be their first kill together.

Hannibal turned off the car lights long before they slowly rolled down the drive and pulled up outside the broken down old house. It had once been a nursing home of sorts, later inherited by the grandson of the proprietor.

Will had held back information from the FBI for this. They had discussed it at length and both were as certain as they possibly could be that Francis Dolarhyde was in fact the serial killer that local trash tabloids had declared *The Tooth Fairy*.

*

Hannibal spent a lot of time building walls. It was natural to see if someone would be clever enough to climb over them.

Stood outside the university, Mischa watched the young medical student flirt with Hannibal. When he touched a hand to Hannibal's arm, she noted the slight flinch there that others wouldn't see. So paranoid of touch, so scared of what it could lead to.

They said their goodbyes and Hannibal walked to join Mischa. It was their usual habit to walk home together from their respective places of learning. At least here and now. It would all change again soon. They had discussed many times the need to move on, to keep the secret of Hannibal's gift, of Mischa's agelessness.

Even so -

"You should spend time with him Hannibal. Go on a date?"

“What do you know of dating.” Hannibal said cooly, clearly irritated at the intrusion but immediately realising himself, his words. His words to a child who was not a child. Who would never know what it was to be a woman. “Forgive me. I’m sorry Mischa...I-”

“You are in pain Hannibal. I see it. Pain at the thought that we will leave and you cannot explore this. Pain that if you stayed and explored as you wish you would end up hurting him.”

The truth buzzed between them as they continued to walk in silence.

The truth was she knew Hannibal was no stranger to the physical affection of men and women, though he tried to hide it from her as though she were a child. She was neither blind nor stupid. She saw, and she could also see the truth in this - in each time Hannibal might chance to care for someone. He would end it. Because he was terrified of what his touch might cause him to do.

What if they lived some happy years and then death came to call on his loved one? Would Hannibal be able to accept that death or feel the need to revive them? As he had Mischa - albeit unwittingly. And what then? No further caresses and physical expressions of love. Which perhaps Hannibal could live with if the other could. But the risk, the constant threat of an accidental touch and a final death that would devastate.

They spoke no more on the subject, and that evening Hannibal left their apartments and returned the next morning with fine cuts of meat. Mischa’s heart weighed heavy, but as always, each taste though it should be bitter, was instead sweet.

Mischa couldn’t explain what Hannibal was. She couldn’t quantify what he did. She could only love him and accept him.

*

It was full dark when Mischa left the house, knowing that it would still be some hours before Will and Hannibal would return.

She hadn’t planned this, other than having searched for someone who might help. Holistic therapy that seemed to be more than met the eye - a picture of jars of honey and a promise to quiet the mind. Mischa had a feeling about it, something that had reminded her of the night in the burning car.

She hadn’t planned to find them tonight. It was just the fluke of learning they were so close - not far by taxi. The local service they used were accustomed to the small child going to and fro in their cars. Though never this late, and she found herself bitter at having to prepare an excuse for the driver.

He didn’t ask for one, and drove silently to the home and workplace of Katherine Pimms.

The taxi waited on the street as Mischa walked the path and knocked on the door.

An older woman opened the door with a smile.

“A late visit for a-” she stopped herself and Mischa felt the scrutiny. An evaluation. Her heart was in her throat as the expression on the woman’s face formed into a gentle understanding. “Oh, poor thing. I see you.”

Mischa let out the breath she had been holding - somewhere between laughter and tears. Even Hannibal could forget sometimes, and Will was only just beginning to see, but never before had anyone known like this that Mischa was no child.

“Come in.” Katherine Pimms ushered her in and closed the door behind her. She lead the way into a living room, full of plants and new age treatments. Jars and bottles.

A sense of magic and the overwhelming scent of honey.

“Sit. I should tell you now I have no cure for you. But I don’t think that’s why you are here.”

Mischa shook her head and they both sat. The place reminded her in some odd way of that terrible cabin. Old and musty, and honey. There had been that sweet scent there too but no bees. Perhaps they had nested somewhere in the roof but Mischa had never seen them. But more than that was the sense of power in the place. Of otherworldliness. That cabin had been only thinly veiled - somewhere between realities it had seemed as a child. But that felt true of this house too, of Katherine Pimms.

“I don’t expect a cure. I just… I want happiness. For myself, for my brother and his friend. Your advertisement, it spoke to me, I hoped you would be able to… help in some way?”

Katherine closed her eyes and took a breath. “You, I can see clearly. I am not so certain of your brother.” her eyes moved rapidly under her lids as she continued. “He brings both life and death. They should be pushing daisies. They are eaten?” she asked, her eyes opening and locking on Mischa’s.

“Eating daisies?” Mischa’s mind went to the garden. The daisies that grew and grew there since Will had moved in. The bees they attracted to the point that sometimes their hum could be forgotten, it was so ingrained.

“No, people.” Katherine smiled, good natured and lacking in any judgement. “He thinks he’s a god. And He is, or an instrument at least. That’s as close as it gets. One face towards life the other towards death. Which will he choose?”

“I would choose death.” Mischa found herself admitting sadly.

“He chose your life.” Katherine seemed to correct her.

“He… he didn’t know that, not at the time. Please. Can you help us? It isn’t enough for me to die. The only reason I have continued this long is to make sure he is well and loved. And now he is but he can never really have the happiness he deserves. That was taken away from him as a child, and I need to give it back.”

“It isn’t yours to give.” Katherine smiled. “His gift comes from a deep well of emotions. He expressed them in the right time and place and a god heard him, and imparted some of itself

in him... Or the wrong time and place, if it is a curse? His love for you caused this, love is very powerful, it is hard to break or replace."

Mischa felt tears stinging her eyes.

"But… I will help. There is something... All these years you've protected him from hopelessness. And that's beautiful."

*

Will stood panting and drenched in blood. The sight stole Hannibal's breath.

His own suit, plastic and sealed, was covered in blood and gore, as they stood in the garden beneath the moonlight that turned the red blood black.

Dolarhyde lay between them. Revealed and admitted. A dragon slain.

Will's breath shuddered as their eyes found each other's and then he let out a low, dark chuckle.

"Perhaps we shouldn't do this again. Because all I want to do right now is kiss you, lick that blood off your face, so much so I'm tempted to risk the consequences."

Hannibal tensed at Will's words. The unguarded lust in his eyes. Oh if things had been different.

Will stepped towards him, around the body, and Hannibal flinched but didn't move as he hoped Will wouldn't reach out to him.

"Hannibal, I… I've never been one for eye contact you know." A chuckle. "Or much physical contact, even with those I've trusted. I find it overwhelming and yet… it's so hard not to reach out and touch you. I've never wanted contact more in my entire life."

Will did reach out then, quicker than Hannibal was able to avoid - a hand on his suited arm. Hannibal could feel the warmth of it through the plastic and fabric beneath that.

"Do you feel alive, Will?" He swallowed, breath stuttering.

"I feel like I'm fading." Will replied with a hollow laugh. "Every day, I need you more. I'm as alone as you are."

Hannibal's jaw clenched and he wondered if they might *both* die if Will touched him.

"Hannibal I-" Will looked down at his hand on Hannibal's arm before moving to stand directly in front of him. Mirroring the placement with his other hand. Hannibal's hands were gloved, but they were separate from the suit and Hannibal would never take even a remote risk, but -

It was the work of moments, but Will pulled him down to the ground, the grass damp with dew and blood. Hannibal didn't struggle, trusting Will - he would either touch him or not and

Hannibal wasn't sure he cared which in that moment.

Will pushed him down and straddled his hips so that he could feel how hard Will was, his own sex stirred in response.

"Will…" The name came out on a reverent breath.

"I want to kiss you. All the time I want to. And I want to… I… if this is all we can have… I need it Hannibal. I need you."

Will's hands pushed him firmly onto his back, remaining at his shoulders in a way that Hannibal wasn't sure whether it was to keep him pinned to stop him reaching out or to stop Will.

And then Will moved and they both groaned. Blood, slick on the plastic easing the movement as Will ground his hips down. Will's head fell forward as he groaned again and sought the relief he needed from the friction between them.

All Will had to do was lean down and their lips would meet, but his arms remained rigid - holding them apart. His eyes found Hannibal's nonetheless and Hannibal was lost to them.

Will rut against him, the sensation both too much and not enough for either of them. Their hard cocks pressed together despite the layers. Hannibal's length was pressed against the seam of his fly, adding a sensation that another time might have been uncomfortable, but as Will rut, he pushed back seeking the same friction and a release against that seam.

"I wish I could fuck you." Will moaned. "I want you to cum. Will you…" his breath caught as he seemed to catch a wave of pleasure and resettle himself. "Fuck, I'm close…"

Perhaps it was the words as much as anything, the thought of he and Will being able to enact more than just a simulation of this. Hannibal's balls drew up tight and he shuddered as he released.

"Will…"

"Hannibal… Oh… I, I love…" Will stumbled over his words as Hannibal grunted and shook through his orgasm. As the waves of pleasure began to wane, Will pulled back, sitting back on Hannibal's thighs.

Hannibal wanted to reach out and touch him, clenching his hands into the mud and grass beneath him instead as he watched Will undo his trousers and pull out his hard and leaking length.

"Oh fuck… I…" Will worked himself, long slow strokes at first to recentre, but then quicker motions. Hannibal panted as he watched, overwhelmed by the intimacy and desire of the moment, his fingers digging deep into the mud.

Will's hand moved in fast and even strokes, his other hand reaching down and kneading at the flesh of Hannibal's hips through the layers. Will's eyes had closed with the bliss of it and his teeth bit into his lower lip.

Will groaned and shook as he came - hot seed joining the blood on Hannibal's suit and the rest dribbling over Will's fist as the flow ebbed and they both panted to catch their breath.

Would this ever be enough?

*

Mischa was very quiet on their return and for the subsequent few days. A contemplative silence that would have seemed unnatural and worrisome had she been the age her body suggested.

It wasn't melancholy though, but perhaps resolved determination. Hannibal knew what was coming - thought he knew - she was going to remind him it was time to move on. They couldn't stay much longer and Will would have to decide.

He had a sudden fear that Will wouldn't come with them. Wouldn't that be easier for everyone? No risk of fatality.

The thoughts stirred in his mind as he tidied away plates from dinner, his ears pricking up at an unexpected knock at the door. It wasn't especially late but they weren't anticipating guests. He folded the tea cloth and set it down before making his way to the front door. He had just reached out his hand to open it when Mischa appeared at his side.

"It's… I invited someone." She smiled weakly and Hannibal quirked a brow. She had few friends, perhaps Abigail - though the teen saw her as a child. It wasn't as though she attended a school, instead keeping up the pretense of being home schooled. In reality her life was a lonely one, and his had been little better until meeting Will.

A second knock drew Hannibal's attention back to the door and he opened it.

An eccentric, blonde haired woman stood smiling at them both, the smile becoming fonder as she focused on Mischa.

"Tonight then?" She asked and Mischa nodded.

There seemed to be a slight hum from outside, perhaps a streetlight with a broken power connection, but… maybe not. There was something familiar and haunting about it and even as the woman entered and Hannibal closed the door behind her, it made him shudder.

Mischa lead them all through to the sitting room, where Will sat with a tumbler of whiskey, he looked up as they entered, a questioning glance to Hannibal.

"Will, Hannibal, this is Katherine Pimms… I asked her to… she's here to help." Mischa wrung her hands, another of those affectations she had picked up that gave away her true age. "She knows about your… your gift, Hannibal. She understands. She's going to help."

"In what way?" Will asked eagerly, his eyes locking to Hannibal's and full of meaning, as he stood and placed his tumbler on a side table.

“I can help rebalance life and death here.” Pimms answered. “You have created a balance of imbalance, and it eats away your happiness. I could see that before Mischa told me anything. I could feel you in this city long before your sister sought me out.”

She had the soft smile of someone not quite in charge of their faculties, and Hannibal might have dismissed her if this wasn’t so out of character for Mischa to have initiated. If the words she spoke didn’t feel true.

“I… I’m not sure I understand.” Hannibal replied directly to Mischa who looked an odd mixture of content and anxious - it didn’t become her childish features.

“She can't make me grow into a womanly shape but he can show me how to die. How to give that life to Will.” Mischa smiled gently. “Please don’t be sad. You weep, but Hannibal you haven't tears enough for what you did to me, as unintentional as it was. Six more mortal years, seven, I would have had that shape. I would have been a woman, but that time was taken from me, from us, by fate and circumstances.”

Hannibal felt silent tears wet his cheeks but couldn’t say a word.

“I want to return that time to you, I want to return that time to Will and Katherine can help us.”

Pimms interjected softly – “Words and actions are sometimes beyond our control.”

“Words are living things. They have personality, point of view, agenda.” Hannibal managed to reply, choking the words out, bitter on his tongue.

“Emotions too.” Pimms smiled.

Hannibal crouched in front of Mischa - eye to eye.

"What you’re suggesting… Don't make me choose between you. I don't think I can." his voice cracked and he suddenly felt the full weight of their conjoined agony.

"You don't have to. It's my choice, let me make it." Mischa replied. She truly seemed like the adult she was - he could almost imagine the form of the woman she should have become. She would have looked much like their mother.

He looked up to Pimms. "How is it to be done?"

Her smile had a sadness to it. "Your touch gave life and can take it away. But to truly restore your friend, to take this gift meddlesome Bangpūtys gave you... Requires more. A sacrifice."

She urged Hannibal back to his feet and took his hand. They led the way out to the garden but the noise was clear as soon as they reached the back of the house. Buzzing so loud it drowned out everything else.

Pimms had to raise her voice over it as she turned to Mischa. "They know. Now is the time, now or never if you're ready."

Hannibal felt anguish as as she nodded. They'd had decades together, he didn't know a life without her. It was too soon. Part of him wasn't ready to lose her, and part had been prepared for such a thing since the cabin. Since fully realising that even an accidental glancing touch would end her life once more. He wanted to tell her no, not now, not without warning. But Mischa was clearly settled and what would he be - truly what sort of monster would he be - if he took that from her as he had her childhood and adulthood in one damnable touch.

Pimms opened the back door and the Buzzing was deafening. The garden in the space of a few hours since they had left it last, had grown into a wilderness of daisies. Bees, thick and swarming over them, the setting sun glinting on their wings and making them look almost like fireflies in the oncoming dusk.

Pimms left them at the door, the three of them hesitant as she walked into the throng. The bees parted and the daisies seemed to do much the same as they swayed from her. The bees even seemed to hush so she could speak without shouting.

“The dead push up daisies… these are all your dead Hannibal and I’m not one to judge you on that.” She gave him the same fond smile she had previously given Mischa. He found himself drawn - walking forward into the clearing her presence had made.

“What do I do? If this is the last thing I can give Mischa, the last thing I can do for her.” Hannibal’s chest was tight as he tried to hold back the tears that threatened to streak his face further.

“Just remember Hannibal. I can help with the rest… tell me… it was snowing.” Pimms said.

Hannibal nodded and then felt the cold bite of a snowflake fall upon his face. The world beyond the clearing seemed to disappear as though hidden behind a wall of bees.

“And there was fire.” Hannibal said.

Heat battered them for a moment and all but Pimms drew back a little. A small section of the swarm were aflame - truly like fireflies now as they had been that night. The heat and light they gave off was more than it should have been and yet they burned and didn’t perish.

Hannibal felt his heart racing. This was how it had been. This was how he should have lost Mischa. His heart screamed as though it wanted to be set free of his chest. He didn’t want this…

The snow began to slow and the flames began to fade.

“Hannibal, this is Mischa’s choice. For her Hannibal, for your love of her.”

Mischa stepped towards him, that practised distance. “Hannibal… remember after the orphanage, with Lady Murasaki you would smash the china, create new whole pieces. Beautiful broken things for me, that were me, you would say. I kept so many.”

Hannibal tried to focus his eyes on her, clouded with tears. “Occasionally I drop a teacup to shatter on the floor. On purpose. I’m not satisfied when it doesn’t gather itself up again.

Someday, I thought... perhaps a cup will come together."

Mischa smiled. "It might never gather for us, or maybe this will gather me up and make me whole again? Fate and circumstance have returned us back to this moment, when the teacup shatters. Will you forgive me this, Hannibal?"

Hannibal nodded and let the tears fall.

The snow fell heavier and the flames burned brighter.

"Do I take her life?" Hannibal asked Pimms.

She nodded. "If you want your teacup whole, both of them… then you must allow yourself to be the vessel." She stepped toward the three of them and surprised them all by taking Will by the hand, leading him forward so that the four of them stood almost in a circle - Hannibal between Will and Mischa and Pimms before them. "Love is a very powerful thing."

Pimms was still smiling as she took hold of both of Hannibal's hands. He gave them freely and in an instant wished he hadn't when she quickly moved them to each side. Almost as if magnetically attracted he found his hands held - one by Mischa, one by Will.

"One face towards life, the other towards death." Pimms told them.

The buzzing renewed, the thrum of the bees vibrating through them. The snow fell dense. The flames raged.

"I love you Hannibal." Mischa all but whispered and yet he could still hear her over the din. He turned to face her and found for a moment, for a fraction of a second, he could see the adult she should have been. And she was beautiful.

Will cried out in pain and Hannibal turned so fast to see him his head spun. Will's free hand was up to his neck - his broken neck a mirror of Mischa's childhood death, of his own death. He cried again and sunk to his knees at the same moment Mischa dropped too. Hannibal went down with them both, his knees smashing to the ground.

And then the snow was gone. The flames faded to nothing. The bees departed and there was silence from the painful hum. A terrible and wonderful silence.

*

The shop bell rang and Hannibal looked up. He had expected to see Alana, it was almost her usual time but instead it was a young woman he had never met before. And yet, there was something very familiar about her.

She took a booth near the window and started browsing the menu. Hannibal studied her openly, in a way he was rarely one to do. So much so that when Will came out from the kitchen he slipped his arms around Hannibal's waist and peaked over his shoulder.

"Something interesting?"

Hannibal could hear the grin. He turned in Will's arms and returned the wide smile he found. He leaned in, pressing his lips softly against Will's and enjoying the nip at his bottom lip he received in return.

"Never as interesting as you." Hannibal chuckled and Will kissed him back then, slow and sensual, very inappropriate for the workplace not that he could much bring himself to care. Every time they kissed felt like a blessing, something to be valued and savoured.

"Ahem." A delicate cough and polite plea for attention drove them apart.

They both stepped back enough to allow a more appropriate amount of space between them and looked at the woman at the counter.

"Sorry." her smile was playful and didn't convey one bit the apology. "I… I'm new around here and hungry and someone recommended this place. But… if you're busy."

Will chuckled and winked at the woman who just grinned in response.

"Forgive my husband." Hannibal tried for indignant but knew he would miss before he opened his mouth, so he turned into the levity of it. "He has an insatiable appetite for me that I struggle to control in him."

The woman let out a bark of laughter at that and then clapped her hands over her mouth.

There was an easy conversation then, and the woman - who introduced herself as Charlotte Charles or Chuck to her friends - eagerly took Hannibal's recommendation of the lime honeyed-chicken pie. Stating that she had a love for honey almost as insatiable as Will's love for Hannibal. Chuck stood with them at the counter a while, open and honest. The sort of friendliness that came with being in a new place and meeting new people. She had moved to look after her aunts, she had been orphaned as a child and they had taken her in then - she was returning the favour.

Hannibal smiled and took under serious consideration that he should make more dessert pies - perhaps apple pie with Gruyère baked into the crust, if he insisted on something partially savoury.

When she went back to the booth to await her meal he could see Will frowning at her, studying her as he had himself.

"She seems familiar doesn't she? I feel like I've met her before."

Hannibal found a pain in his chest easing, a pain he hadn't really known had been there. "I've seen her before. I… I think time did reverse. The teacup that I shattered did come together. A place was made for Mischa in this world."

Will turned his frown on Hannibal, not quite understanding. But it wasn't necessary. Hannibal could see very clearly, and one day Will would too. And maybe, just maybe Mischa might too.

Do we talk about teacups and time and the rules of disorder?

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